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A national policy of agricultural...

[London?]

[1906?]

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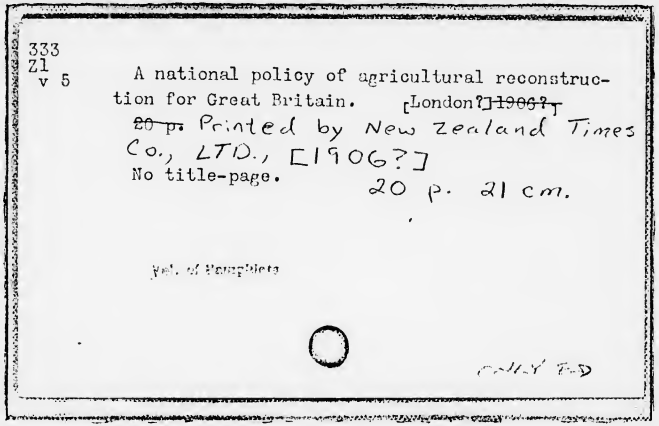

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A National Policy of Agricultural Reconstruction for Great Britain.

The Decline of Agriculture.

THE decline of agriculture in Great Britain dates from the bad harvests of 1876-82. The simultaneous introduction of very cheap ocean transport and the extension of agriculture in America and elsewhere led to a tremendous fall in prices. According to the Board of Trade figures, the fall in 1898-1902, compared with 1871-5, has been 37·7 per cent. in corn, and 18·9 per cent. in meat, bacon, fish, and dairy produce. The effect on incomes derived from land has been catastrophic. The landlord's share, the gross annual value of lands assessed to income tax under Schedule A (including tithe rent charge, ornamental gardens, gardens exceeding one acre, farmhouses and buildings, etc.) fell in Great Britain from £59,568,253 in 1879-80 to £42,507,895 in 1902-3. The average reduction in rent has thus been 28·5 per cent., but in some localities the fall has been as much as 60 per cent. The fall in the value of the fee simple is about the same, and small and encumbered owners have suffered most. Farming capital was largely swept away in the early years of the decline, and even now farmers have to live close and put nothing by. The estimated amount of farmers' profits fell in Great Britain from £28,405,086 in 1879-80 to £14,288,974* in 1902-3, or one-half. Agricultural laborers alone have gained during the last thirty years; but although the average weekly earnings in England according to Mr. Wilson Fox, are now 18s. 3d., the average weekly family expenditure is 20s. 3d.

Between 1871 and 1904 arable land in Great Britain has decreased by 3,122,000 acres, and permanent pasture has increased 4,668,000 acres. There has been a great change from corn raising to cattle rearing and dairy farming, with less employment of labor. Simultaneously imports have increased enormously, not only in grain and meat, but also in dairy produce, eggs, poultry, etc., where we might have hoped to hold our own.

The Sins of the Landlords.

The landlord system must bear a large share of the blame for the decay of agriculture. The bad times found many landlords with burdened estates and no reserve, saved in prosperous times, wherewith to keep their property in a state of efficiency. Placed in the position of the social and economic leaders of the rural districts, they have, as a class, largely devoted themselves to drawing their rents and trying to escape public burdens. They have not compelled their tenants to be good farmers; in fact, by obstructive rules and by annual tenancies, they have often prevented improvements. They have not stood between the agricultural laborers and their employers; on the contrary, by neglecting to provide a sufficient

* Of this £292,966 is for market gardens, etc.; £10,974 farmers' profits assessed under Schedule D.

1906

supply of sanitary cottages, they have powerfully contributed towards the rural exodus. Locally they have misused their economic strength for political and sectarian ends; while nationally they have set up a false ideal before the nation. To-day they still draw about £43,000,000, or three times the farmers' profits, from the land of Great Britain, with, as the evidence before the Royal Commission on Agriculture showed, disastrous results to the nation. "The evidence goes to show that over renting (1) has been a chief cause of depression in bringing farmers to ruin, and in deteriorating the condition of the land; (2) is even now very general; and (3) that the opinion that further reductions are necessary and inevitable, is, among farming witnesses, practically universal. . . . There is much evidence to show that reductions are by no means universal, and that in many districts and on many estates the system of temporary remissions or abatements, sometimes wholly insufficient to meet the times, is still common. In many cases, even in districts where depression is general, there would seem to have been neither reductions nor abatements of any kind." (Minority Report, F. A. Channing, M.P.) The main work of administration is done by a private service of estate agents, bailiffs, and foremen; and the landlord is a mere parasite on the industry of the country. As a class landlords have failed in their duty as "captains of industry," and it is only fitting that they should be swept aside to make room for some better system.

The Faults of the Farmers.

Farmers, as a body, have shown a great lack of that capacity and adaptability with which men in other occupations have met bad times. They have clung to the old idea that wheat growing was their only duty, and stubbornly resisted every attempt to persuade or coax them into better business methods. By sweating their laborers and vexing them with petty tyrannies, they drove them to the towns as soon as the way became open. If the blame lies mainly with a past generation, the present is not exempt. "Farmers rarely welcome new ideas," says Mr. Rider Haggard. To their inaction is due much of our dependence on foreign lands for food. Mr. R. E. Turnbull, the agricultural expert, says *:—"Fully fifty per cent. of the cattle marketed for beef in this country are of second or third quality, and whilst cattle of the best quality have given fairly remunerative prices for the food they have consumed, second quality cattle have seldom helped to improve the banking account. Third quality cattle, which probably formed one-eighth of the whole supply, have invariably caused a serious loss to the farmers who have bred them or fed them for beef. . . . Foreign competition can be successfully met alone by farmers who produce household foods of the best quality. There is vast room for improvement in fully half the herds and flocks in this country." In butter the British farmer has succumbed to superior quality, while he has made no serious attempt to supply the large quantities of eggs, poultry, fruit, and vegetables demanded by our population. Even in milk, where

* Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland, 5th Series, Vol. XV., 1903.

he has a monopoly, he supplies only 16½ gallons per head of population yearly.

It is not denied that there are many capable farmers, just as there are some good landlords; but there are not enough of either class to go round. Nor is it questioned that in the best qualities of produce and cattle we more than hold our own. Nevertheless, our agriculture has not kept pace with the growth of our population; and in all the great mass products our farmers are beaten out of the field by the abundant cheap supplies from abroad, mainly because they have neglected the business side of their occupation, the marketing of their produce.

Aims of the State.

1. Utilization of National Resources.

We are thus in presence of the complete failure of private enterprise as applied to agriculture, and the case for State intervention is complete. The objects which we must keep before us are several. Firstly, there is the utilization of the land as a part of the national resources at present allowed to run to waste. That we can ever become completely independent of foreign sources of food supply is probably impossible. It is true that the United States are dropping out of the international wheat market, but neither Canada nor Argentina has yet attained its full development. Yet that is no reason for not using to the full the resources which we possess. Cheap food supplies are certainly welcome, but we cannot accept an economic situation which, if allowed to develop to its logical outcome, would lead to the abandonment of agriculture in Great Britain. The fertility of our soil is undoubted, and the quality of our products, when equal care is given, is not behind that of our competitors. The spectacle of untilled land in the country and unoccupied men in the towns is an indication of great material and intellectual waste.

2. Increase of Agricultural Population.

In the second place we wish to maintain and increase our agricultural population. There is no evidence that the people has degenerated from a state of physical excellence in the remote past when no statistics were kept, and there is proof that the health of the towns has vastly improved from what it was half a century ago. On the other hand it is certain that at present the conditions of life in towns are much more injurious to health than life in the country. However much may be done by better sanitation, shorter hours of work, and more reasonable forms of enjoyment, it is certain that for a long time to come factory towns and the working-class quarters in all large towns must continue to be undesirable places to live in. Even under highly improved conditions they must be defective in air and sunlight, and particularly disadvantageous to children. It is probable that in the future this will be altered and that the working classes will live in healthy suburbs at a distance from their places of work—that in the current phrase the towns will be "spread over the country." But it is not probable that this development will be achieved within that period of time for which as wise politicians we

n ust look forward in framing a policy. Without, therefore, deciding o n the abstract merits of town and country life, or trying to deter- n ine what degree of suburbanity will carry the maximum of welfare, w e must lay our plans for strengthening in the national interest that s ction of our population which at present contains the greatest e ements of health. Between 1851 and 1901 the number of adult n ales engaged in agriculture has fallen from 1,904,687 to 988,340, a though one would have expected that the practical elimination of f male labour (where there was a fall from 436,174 to 52,459) and the g eat decline in the employment of males under 20 (from 327,615 to 1 36,076)—both of these being healthy developments—would have r quired to be compensated by an increase in the labor of men. N aturally some uneasiness has been aroused, both on grounds of n ational health and because the loss of one great element of variety in national life is threatened. To find a solution for this part of our problem is by no means easy, for it involves the task of making agri- c ltural life as attractive to the working man as industrial life in c ties. It involves something more than this, the apathy and s olidity which characterize the agricultural laborer to-day—the evil e fects of his life of isolation—must be removed. While we desire a n increase of the agricultural population we equally desire that the a gricultural worker of the future should be very different, intellectu- a ly and morally, from the agricultural laborer whom we know.

A Twenty-five Years' Policy.

In sketching out a national policy in agriculture, it is necessary n ot to take short views. A quarter of a century has passed since t e "good times of 1875," during which the problem has become d sperate. We must look forward to at least twenty-five years' w ork before we can achieve a revolution to prosperity. In pro- portion as the issues are great, so is the task of reform difficult. T his necessity of working over a lengthened period imposes a d ouble character on our policy. While, on the one hand, we must s ek out the proper means of reorganizing agriculture, we must, on t e other, take steps to ameliorate the existing order of things during the time which must elapse before it is replaced by a better. I n that way what is good in existing modes will have an opportunity o surviving and developing according to their capabilities, and from t eir fate we will derive guidance for our other plans. Since this improved present order will be the milieu in which our more revo- l utionary schemes will operate, the methods of amelioration must c me first in our discussion.

Ameliorative Measures.

1. Regulation of Agricultural Wages.

The most immediate necessity is to begin by improving the c ndition of that class of the rural population, the agricultural l borers, who most need help. Broadly speaking, this means that w e must deal with agricultural wages. So far the laborers have s own themselves unable to combine for any length of time to o tain better terms for themselves; and such improvement as has t ken place in their remuneration, which is still rather below the

subsistence level, has been due to the scarcity of rural labor, the very phenomenon which we desire to abolish. Cash earnings range according to locality from £30 to £60 a year in England, including the extra payments during hay and corn harvest, and for piecework and overtime; the average weekly wage, exclusive of all extras, running from 11s. to 22s. These wide local variations obviously preclude all idea of a national minimum wage which would be of any real value. Cash earnings at Banbury in 1901, according to Mr. Wilson Fox, ranged from £32 to £35 a year; and while a minimum wage of say £48 would mark a very acceptable rise in comfort for the laborers of that district, it would be somewhat meaningless for the laborers of Northumberland and Durham, where earnings in the same year ran from £48 to £58. How far it might be possible to improve matters by regulating simply the cash weekly wage, leaving other payments to be matters of individual bargaining, is doubtful. If all extras could be abolished, and a regular weekly wage substituted for them, the task of regulation would be simplified; and the domestic economy of the laborers would be improved, and their dependence on the local shopkeeper—the current indebtedness which is wiped out when the extra money comes in—might be abolished. Yet it is a difficult thing to interfere with long established custom, especially when dealing with such an ingrained conservative as the British working man. The simplification of remuneration could only be safely taken in hand when asked for by the laborers of any particular district. So long as the existing system was maintained in its broad features, it would be necessary to have regard to the customary extra payments in fixing the weekly wage; and if it turned out later that the laborer weakly gave away in bargaining for these what he had gained in his regular wage, they too would have to be brought within the scope of regulation. Payments in kind further complicate the problem. Beer is generally given in haytime and harvest. Coals, wood, potatoes, barley, oatmeal, milk are supplied free in other places. Elsewhere potato ground is found, ploughed, and manured. When cottages are part of the farm equipment, they are generally let to the laborer at a nominal rent of 1s. or 1s. 6d. a week instead of the 3s. or 4s. they would normally fetch. In the North of England they are usually supplied free with garden ground, making a notable addition to the income of the laborer.

Wage Courts.—The State, then, being forced, on account of general national interests, to intervene for the purpose of securing to the laborer a substantial improvement in his standard of life, can only do so effectively by paying regard to local conditions. Courts to fix wages must be established in areas of appropriate size, probably counties, or county council areas. The constitution of these bodies will be discussed later. Their function should not be merely to ascertain what wage the free play of competition would determine and sanction that, as so many arbitrators have done. Their duty, as expressed by statute, should be the fixing of wages for a term of years, say two or three, at such a level as would enable a laborer to bring up his family in comfort and, at the same time, to have the possibilty of rising to a higher level of welfare. For this

purpose all local customs and conditions should be taken into account, and, without any attempt at ensuring the same level of remuneration over the whole country, or aiming at a very large and sudden increase, which would disrupt the local agricultural economy, the principle should be kept steadily in view that no agriculture should be permitted which depended on the sweating of the laborer. If meanwhile, as is possible, a national minimum wage, based on the minimum demands of bare healthy subsistence, is fixed, the work of the courts will be facilitated, and they can definitely devote themselves to raising the standard of life above this minimum level.

Cottage Rents.—Cottage rent forms a serious complication of the wages problem. The present system of treating a low rent as involving a grant in aid of wages is thoroughly vicious. Broadly speaking, the rural cottages of England are only fit to be pulled down; and the impossibility of getting a rent which will repay the cost of construction, prevents landlords from rebuilding. On the other hand, laborers prefer not to live in the farmers' cottages if they can help it; nor should we do anything to perpetuate their dependence on the farmer and landlord. Consequently, it is to the local authorities that we must look for that supply of comfortable cottages, with sufficient gardens, without which all other efforts at increasing, or even retaining, the agricultural population will fail. Nor, in turn, can we expect local authorities to build when they cannot get an economic rent. In fixing wages, therefore, we must expect our courts to take such a rent into account; and the farmers, where they still let cottages, must be left free to raise their rents to a proper level.

The Unmarried Laborer.—One other crux of wage fixing remains, the needs of different laborers according to the size of their families. On this it can only be said that we must work by averages. The unmarried laborer will certainly gain compared with the married, but, on the other hand, he will thus be enabled to save up for house furnishing and the higher expenses of married life. If one result is an increased birth-rate in the rural districts, that need not trouble us. Where the Malthusian problem presses is only in the overcrowded and degenerate districts of our towns. Comfort, in the long run, does not make for an awkward population question.

2. Fair Rents.

Having established the most necessitous class of agriculturists on a sounder economic basis, and having arrived at an approximately more rational estimation of the labor cost of farming, we must next deal with the farmers themselves. Obviously their rents will require readjustment in consequence of the increase in wages. Even under present conditions rents are very generally too high, and the good farmer improves his land only for the profit of the landlord. "At present," says Mr. Pringle, one of the Sub-commissioners under the Royal Commission on Agriculture, "there is on many estates a distinct penalty attached to good farming and a clear incentive to bad farming." In addition, the system of annual tenure does not make for good cultivation. The farmer wants, besides fair rents, reasonable fixity of tenure, freedom from restrictive covenants as to tillage, and proper compensation for improvements. The landlord, on the other hand, wants as much rent as he can get and security that his land should be properly farmed.

Once again private enterprise has failed to secure the ends desired, once again the State must interfere. We want to set up County Land Courts which shall fix fair rents, say, for a tenancy of seven years, and to which disputes as to proper cultivation and compensation for improvements may be referred. In this way the farmer would obtain what he most needs, while at the same time the landlord would have a means of getting rid of an inefficient tenant. But there are not only inefficient tenants but inefficient landlords as well, nor can there be any unfairness in the court requiring a landlord to make any necessary expenditure on buildings, drainage, etc., on terms to be fixed by the court. Irish experience will warn us against one thing, setting up any form of dual ownership. There must be one owner only of the land, the farmer must possess only a right of user during his tenancy. If he dies or wishes to resign his farm before his term runs out, then there will be only a matter of account between him and his landlord to be settled, if necessary, by the court. It may so happen that in some districts economic rent will entirely disappear. In such cases once more private interests must yield to the requirements of the community, and landlords may comfort themselves with the knowledge that it is not proposed to reopen the accounts of the past, or to demand restitution of what they may have, to the national injury, annexed wrongfully of the product of the land. To such owners the right might be conceded of requiring the State to purchase their land at a price fixed by the court.

Mr. Gilbert Murray's Plan.—Mr. Gilbert Murray, the Derbyshire land agent, outlined before the Royal Commission on Agriculture a rent fixing scheme which is worth reproduction: "It must be conceded that any equitable method of fixing the rental value of land must be based on its capabilities of production, this being the first and most important factor in the calculation, and on which the subsequent success or failure of the scheme entirely depends. Take the land in a normal state, without regard to extra manurial condition, which, according to the Act of 1883, belongs to the tenant, or to dilapidations for which the landlord is entitled to compensation. The valuer carefully inspects each separate enclosure belonging to each holding, making a note of the average quantities of produce it is best adapted to produce; having done this, calculating the quantities and attaching to each the market prices of the day are purely clerical; having scheduled the quantities under the different heads a permanent standard is arrived at, forming a basis on which all future fluctuations of prices are calculated; by this means the average gross value per acre of the produce is ascertained. The next factor is the cost of production, which varies in almost every occupation. The items which go to make up the gross cost of production are manurial labor, horse labor, seeds and plants, tradesmen's bills, interest on capital, tenant's remuneration, insurance of stocks and crops, and depreciation on implements and machinery; collectively these are the outgoings which, deducted from the gross value of the produce

per acre, the balance is the amount available for rent, rates and tithe; the latter in whatever way they are put are landlord's payments. This may fairly be taken as a fixed amount, the only quantity liable to fluctuation is manual labor. . . . Practical experience confirms that this is the only correct and fair method of ascertaining the rental value of land; if applied to a sliding scale it will mete out equal justice to owner and occupier. The tenant has a free hand for the exercise of his skill and judgment, and the expenditure of his capital in increasing the productive power of the soil to its utmost limit without the fear of an increase of rent, which is ruled by the average prices of the year calculated on the normal produce of the land which still remains a fixed quantity. Here we have an incentive to an improved system of cultivation by which the land would be stimulated and the produce greatly increased. So far the rent has been fixed on the basis of its present capabilities of production. In many cases drainage and buildings are necessary in order to fully develop the natural capabilities of the soil. In every case it is essential that all estate improvements should be done by the landlord. . . . The interest on the outlay on drainage and buildings should be paid by the tenant." (App. A, xviii., Vol. I.)

Well-known landlords like the Duke of Richmond, Lord Aberdeen and Sir M. Hicks Beach are known to be in favor of the fixing of rents by valuation and not by competition. Several bills for the institution of land courts have been introduced into Parliament by Messrs. Channing, Lambert, Luttrell, Price and others. The evidence before the Royal Commission also shows that while farmers are still mainly in favor of the existing system their opinions are changing.

Agricultural Courts.

So far we have talked only vaguely of Wage Courts and Rent Courts. From many points of view it would be advantageous to have only one authority to deal both with wages and with rents. In future rents will be largely conditioned by wages, on the principle that the first charge on agriculture must be the comfortable maintenance of those directly engaged on the land, whether farmers or laborers. There is scarcely the material in rural districts for constructing Wage Boards on the New Zealand principle, consisting of equal numbers of elected representatives of employers and employed with a neutral chairman. Both in fixing wages and rents the primary characteristics of the court should be independence, ability and acquaintance with agricultural affairs. These would probably best be secured by nomination of the members by the Board of Agriculture, with perhaps the additional safeguard that the names should be laid before Parliament in Orders in Council. The Agricultural Court —to choose a name which would cover all its functions—should consist of few members, preferably three, and its area should be not less than that of a county or part of a county forming a county council area. Perhaps it might be found possible to group counties together, but the need for paying regard to all local conditions would probably depress the balance in favor of the smaller area. In wage matters the court should first proceed by way of a public enquiry, and, to facilitate the transaction of this part of its business, assessors, representing landlords, farmers and laborers, might be nominated either by the county or parish councils.

Defects not Remedied.

The measures so far suggested would probably improve the condition of farmers and laborers, but they are not in themselves sufficient to place agriculture in the position in which we desire to see it. No provision is made that agricultural laborers should be anything but laborers for hire. The immediate aim of the legislation proposed is to raise them to the same level of comfort as industrial workers. Farming capital is, on the average, much below what was formerly considered necessary. It is often nearer £5 an acre than the standard £10. Fair rents and fair wages will considerably diminish the income of the landowning class; and, impoverished as many sections already are, we cannot look to the landlords for the expenditure of the money necessary to put the whole of our cultivable area in a good state. The passing of land into wealthier hands must be a slow process, and the new men who seek to grow "not produce, but partridges," as one of Mr. Rider Haggard's informants complains, would be no improvement on the old. The landlord system is condemned economically by its failure, a failure which it cannot attribute to free trade, since in Denmark, which, equally with ourselves, has free trade in agricultural products, and has no advantage of soil or climate, agriculture is prosperous. Such useful functions as landlords sporadically perform as industrial organizers, could be performed otherwise more cheaply, and with more uniformity and intelligence. And, finally, from the standpoint of national interests, we cannot regard the average country gentleman, with his ideals of sport and idleness, mitigated by casual service to the State in honorific capacities, his claim that he and his fellows constitute the only qualified governing class, and his not infrequent petty tyrannies, as a social product which we desire to perpetuate.

Constructive Measures. The Success of the Foreigner.

The problem is not solved by our plumping in favor of land nationalization, whether wholesale or progressive. We must consider what we desire to be the form of agricultural organization under State ownership. The weakest point in the present system is the marketing of farm products, and before we can tackle reconstruction, we must find the cause of this weakness. Our butter comes from Denmark, Siberia, Argentina, and Australasia; cheese from Canada; eggs from Russia, Galicia, Austria, and Roumania; fresh fruit and vegetables from France and Holland. All these are products which can be supplied at home in good quality, and the market for them is steadily growing. Examples of their successful and profitable production can be given in abundance. Why then should the British grower be uniformly beaten for the mass of the trade by his foreign competitors?

Railways and Agriculture.

The answer is generally that the cause is the policy of British railway companies in conceding preferential rates to foreign im-

porters. Here we have an excellent modern instance of "eyes and no eyes." What is seen is the difference in rates; what is neglected is the fact that foreign consignments arrive in large quantities, easily made up into carloads, with the minimum of expense to the railway companies in collection and delivery. British consignments, on the other hand, are made up of numerous small parcels, necessitating great expense in handling, in clerical labor, and in delivery, and in every way the minimum of profit. It is the difference between a bulk and a parcel trade. Railway companies in recent years, at all events, probably smarting under public opinion and stimulated by the complaints of the Board of Agriculture, have repeatedly offered British farmers exceptional terms if they will unite to send large consignments, but to no purpose.

Large Farms and Combination.

Cheap railway transport and better conditions of sale can be obtained if the farmers will combine. What is lacking is the desire for combination. Now what characterizes the agriculture of the Continent is the prevalence of combination. Alike in Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Hungary, Finland, Poland, Servia, we find a network of co-operative societies all over the country—societies for the co-operative purchase of seeds, manures, implements and machinery, co-operative creameries for the production of butter and cheese, egg-collecting societies, societies for the sale of fruit or grain, export societies, mutual insurance societies, and so on. These are only to be found in very meagre numbers in Great Britain. The one common link between all these different countries is that they are mainly peasant countries, small scale farming is the dominant form. Now it would appear that large scale farming tends to individualism, whereas small holdings make evident the advantages of mutual assistance. To the large farmer the neighboring large farmers appear as his immediate competitors, obscuring the fact that there is room for all so long as such large imports come in from abroad. Hence arise mutual jealousies, unwillingness to let his neighbors know his customers, the fear of helping his rivals to make a profit—all the petty causes which unite to prevent such simple forms of combination as a joint stock creamery or associated consignments of farm produce by railway. "My experience," says Mr. Rider Haggard, "is that large farmers absolutely refuse to combine. Small holdings seem to be essential to successful co-operation."

That the large farm is the root of the evil appears more convincingly when we consider the rapid spread of co-operation among the peasant proprietors of Ireland, where the revival of agriculture is solely due to the development of combined action among the peasants. Even in England, in those districts where small holdings prevail, we find co-operation flourishing. Thus the Evesham fruit growers combine to sell direct without a middleman. The Rew Farm (Dorset) peasant proprietors co-operate in ploughing and threshing. The Vale of Tivy (Cardigan) Society has 600 members, makes joint purchases of supplies, and undertakes the bulk sale of its members' Christmas poultry and pigs. The Emlyn Society also sells poultry.

The Welsh societies are grouped in a federation, which in 1903 made purchases on behalf of its members to the amount of £25,000.

Small Farms and Landlordism.

Side by side with this phenomenon of the development of combination among small holders is the other that small farms yield a better rent than large ones and are in more demand, as may be seen from almost every page of Mr. Rider Haggard's great enquiry. It may be asked why then cannot we leave things to their natural development? The more profitable forms of agriculture must necessarsly drive out the less profitable. The answer is that many landlords cannot afford the capital outlay required to equip the small farms into which the existing large farms might be divided with buildings, fences, etc. Many others violently object to small holdings on account of the additional trouble they give, the resulting interference with sport, and other anti-social reasons. An even more serious objection is the unduly high rents charged for small holdings. Thus Mr. Rider Haggard, after quoting instances near Bewdley of a 40 acre farm paying 50s. an acre, while an adjoining farm of 250 acres of similar land was rented at 20s. an acre, and of a rent of £40 a year for 24 acres of poor land, while a neighboring farm of between 300 and 400 acres paid only 12s. or 13s. an acre, says:—"Although it must be remembered that little holdings are necessarily more expensive than large ones, since the landlord must be remunerated for the cost and upkeep of the extra set of buildings, I admit that the difference in the price asked seems to me excessive. . . . As a remedy, I suggest that such tenancies should, as far as possible, be under the management of county councils or other public bodies, which could buy the land in large blocks and sell or let it out in small ones without being exposed to the temptation of seeking to take advantage of the demand in order to secure an extravagant profit."

The small holding also gives the laborer his first opportunity of rising. With a little capital he can raise himself out of the position of a drudge and undertake work requiring intelligence and foresight. As to the efficiency of small holdings, even when very small, in stemming the rural exodus, Mr. Winfrey gives some interesting evidence. Taking 19 parishes round Spalding, the population in 1881 was 38,789; in 1891, 36,507; and in 1901, 36,392. There is no other reason to be assigned for the lessened decline in the last decade except the allotments and small holdings movement since 1887, in consequence of which some 2,300 acres are now cultivated in allotments and 830 acres in small holdings.

Peasant Proprietorship.

Since then small farms are themselves profitable and tend to the growth of co-operation, since further they increase the rural population by offering an inducement to the laborers to stay on the land, we are justified in taking this system as the most advantageous basis for the reconstruction of agriculture. Complete analogy with foreign countries and with Ireland would, however, lead us to the introduction of a peasant proprietary. Several reasons militate

against this. All the advantages of peasant proprietorship can be secured by according to farmers a sufficient security of tenure, while by not having to purchase his farm, the tenant would have his capital free for stocking his holding. There is also no means of getting rid of an incompetent peasant proprietor except through the Bankruptcy Court. Men of small resources, again, fall easy victims to changes in the world market for agricultural produce ; and the peasantry of Germany, as well as of many English districts, are burdened with mortgages. The creation of a peasant proprietary would introduce us to troublesome questions of inheritance, subletting, and splitting up of properties. Furthermore, there are certain troublesome social phenomena, results of peasant proprietorship, such as the "two children" family, from which we may well ask to be spared. The hard grinding toil on small properties has also bad psychical effects. On the small copyholds in Downham (Cambridgeshire) Mr. Rider Haggard quotes Canon Thornton that the conditions of life are "brutalizing in their hardness," and that the people "grow stolid, hard, and capricious." The Small Holdings Act of 1890 was specially designed to aid the creation of peasant proprietors, but, from that point of view, has been a complete failure. Being forced by urgent necessity to intervene with all the power of the State to rescue the land from the mismanagement of one set of private owners, it would be a shortsighted policy on our part to hand it over to another class of private owners, and that one which has always been stubbornly and timorously conservative.

Socialists and Bonanza Farms.

There is one socialist agricultural ideal which has so far been left untouched. Extending manufacturing development to agriculture and arguing on analogy with the bonanza farms of America, some have contemplated a future in which England would be cut up into large farms with a specialized cultivation, worked by machinery, and managed by State officials. Much the same ideas are put forward by some landlords. This solution leaves out of account one of our objects, the settling of more people on the land. It is a plan to do without agricultural laborers, not to increase them. On economic grounds we have reason to doubt whether giant farms are suited to our conditions. In America they are now being broken up, while we have quite enough evidence, from the published results of small holdings, that volume of output and quality of product do not necessarily depend upon the magnitude of the area cultivated as a unit. In an old country what is needed is intensive cultivation, the most careful attention to the peculiarities of each separate field. This is best attained by farms of moderate size cultivated by persons having a direct personal interest in getting the largest and most marketable product out of the soil. If the State were the farmer it would have to remunerate its overseers by a part share of the produce in order to get the best work out of them ; to cultivate through farmers paying a rent and getting their living and profit out of the surplus is simply to achieve the same end in a way more consonant with our habits of thought.

Graduated Farms.

While, however, as has been said, small farms must form the basis of our new organization, it does not follow that all the farms need be small. Even at present a competent farmer with plenty of capital and a reasonable rent, who employs scientific methods and adapts his knowledge to the changing needs of the market can and does make farming pay, and with the increase of the agricultural population, the labor question would be to some extent solved. It is also most desirable to avoid that monotony of rural society which would result from holdings of uniform size, and there is no reason to suppose that the maximum of capacity would be satisfied by a farm only large enough to occupy a man and his family and, perhaps, one or two assistants. The term "small farm" is itself incapable of sharp definition ; according to the crop and method of culture it may be anything from 20 to 150 acres. From all points of view, not least from the social, the sanest ideal is that of a graduated style of land division, resting firmly on a broad basis of small farms and rising above into larger holdings of different sizes such as will give employment to all grades of agricultural talent.

Land Nationalization.

It is not proposed to nationalize the land of the country at one blow ; it would be almost easier to confiscate it, the price would be less staggering to the taxpayer. We want, before we buy, to know what would be a fair price after allowing for fair wages to the laborer and fair profits to the farmer, and we do not want to have all the land of the country on our hands before we are quite sure what we are going to do with it and have acquired the skill and knowledge necessary for its management. In this matter we must proceed gradually. Nor do we contemplate administration from Whitehall. Agriculture is precisely the thing which demands local management and control. The function of the central government is to assist the local authorities with its credit, to superintend their financial arrangements, and to conduct the scientific study of agriculture.

Statutory Agricultural Committees: Constitution.

At present we have the germ of local administration in the Small Holdings Committee, which every county council is bound by statute to form. But the urban as well as the rural areas are concerned with agriculture ; their supplies of eggs, poultry, vegetables, fruit, butter, cheese and, above all, of milk may well come from their own neighborhood, and the utilization of the land immediately bordering on their margins is of prime importance to them. Consequently, we propose the constitution in each rural county council area of a statutory agricultural committee composed of members of the rural county council and of all urban county councils and borough county councils within its areas. To this joint committee will be entrusted the management of all the lands which may be acquired from private owners. A smaller area than a county would hardly give us the requisite choice among men of ability, but to the parish councils might be delegated certain minor functions at the will of the com-

mittee. It must also be made possible, by the grant of suitable subsistence and travelling allowances, for any qualified man to take part in this work, and not merely the man with a horse and trap who at present has almost a monopoly of county government. When the new system has got thoroughly to work and its possibilities become clearer, it may become advisable to link up these committees into larger areas, as has been proposed in other branches of local administration. But at first it will be better to begin at as many points as possible, and to conciliate and, as it were, circumvent, rural conservatism by sticking to known areas. The expenses of the committee would be a charge on the rents received, though, perhaps, at first there might be a small charge on the rates for starting the machinery.

Powers and Terms of Compulsory Purchase.

The committee would have power to acquire land compulsorily. If a fair rent had already been fixed, then the purchase would proceed on the lines of securing to the vendor his net income, that is, the rent, less the expenditure of about one-fourth on repairs and improvements, which is necessary to keep the land in a lettable condition. If such a rent has not been fixed, then its ascertainment would form a preliminary to purchase. It is not proposed to buy out at full price a landlord whose rent comes from the sweating of the farmer and the laborer. Nor would cash necessarily pass. All that we are bound to do is to guarantee to the vendor the income he could derive from the land under fair conditions. This would mean the creation of a new national stock, the interest of which would be a first charge on the net produce of the land. Regulations would also have to be adopted to secure to an owner who wished to retain his residence sufficient land to preserve the amenities of his house; and he should also be entitled to require that the committee should purchase a whole estate, and not "pick the eyes" out of his property. The central government would come in as a guarantor of the stock, and, before its sanction was given to the issue, it would have to satisfy itself that the purchase was made on proper terms. It also goes without saying that we expect that the incomes of the expropriated landlords would be liable to that heavy and differential taxation to which we hope that all idle drawers of rent and interest will be subjected in the near future. A precedent for the national resumption of land can be found in the law of New Zealand, under which so far 127 estates, aggregating 600,000 acres, have been recovered at a cost of over £2,500,000. There are now 2,500 tenants on the subdivided area, and the profit to the State, after paying interest on the purchase loan and cost of administration, exceeds £27,000 a year. If it were thought desirable to experiment on a somewhat large scale before embarking on a policy of compulsory purchase, we might try the small farm principle on the Crown lands (99,500 acres) and the estates of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (279,000 acres). There it could be tested on a variety of soils and under very diverse conditions. There are also about 650,000 acres of glebe lands which might at once be placed under local administration.

Terms of Leasing.

The committee would next have to divide the land into farms according to the demand, and these might vary in extent from small accommodation holdings for village tradesmen and others who wished to carry on some land culture in addition to their ordinary occupations up to any size for which a reliable tenant could be obtained; but the necessity of increasing the number of settlers on the land would always be kept prominently in view. It would not be the primary aim of the committee to settle on the land the "unemployed" or men who had been failures in every rank of life. Its object would be to pick men who understood agriculture, and preferably those with some capital. Some heavy expenditure would be required to equip the holdings with the necessary buildings, fences, and roads. Tenancies would be granted for seven years, or for twenty-one years, revisible at periods of seven years, so that the tenant might not be able to appropriate the unearned increment of the land; but it should also be clearly understood that a satisfactory tenant would not be arbitrarily disturbed in his holding. At the same time, no mercy would be extended to a bad cultivator; and when a tenant left his holding, either by the efflux of time, or for any other reason, he would have no tenant right to dispose of, but would only be entitled to compensation for unexhausted improvements, and to a fair settlement of accounts as between himself and the State Committee. Rents would be fixed and disputes settled by the independent Agricultural Court, which would also continue the regulation of agricultural wages. Exploitation of the economically weak must not be permitted even to a communal authority. It would be within the power of the committee to rent farms to co-operative associations of laborers, if satisfied as to their industrial and financial capacity. Arrangements might also be made whereby a town could run its own dairy farm or farms, since this is probably the only way in which a municipality can be sure of an uncontaminated supply of milk. Further, the committee should be encouraged, or, perhaps, directed, to establish labor colonies of different classes on which persons unemployed through stress of trade might obtain useful employment, and the surplus population of the towns restored to physical efficiency and put in the way of earning their living. Lastly, the committee might also undertake works of afforestation, though as herein the interests of the whole country, rather than those of a county, would be involved, the closer co-operation and assistance of the central government would be necessary.

Stocking the Farms.

It is a more novel proposal, but one probably necessary, to suggest that the committee might aid its tenants in stocking their farms. We are not without precedents. The Irish Board of Agriculture grants loans at three per cent. to creameries for the purchase of Pasteurizing plant on the collective bond of the members. The Congested Districts Board of Ireland provides fishermen with boats on periodical payments, and between the 5th August, 1891, and the 31st March, 1904, spent £113,894 in buying horses, asses, cattle,

sheep, swine, poultry, implements, etc., for resale to its tenants. New Zealand in 1894, Victoria in 1890 and 1896, New South Wales in 1899 and 1902, passed Acts allowing advances to settlers on mortgage, while West Australia in 1894 and 1896, South Australia in 1895, and Queensland in 1901 established land banks with State loans to promote the occupation, cultivation, and improvement of agricultural lands. We may also mention the advances made to landlords under the Drainage and Improvement Acts, and the recommendation of the Royal Commission that public money should be advanced to owners "for the purpose of agricultural improvements" at a fair rate of interest. £4,000,000 were advanced by the Exchequer under the early Drainage Acts. We, therefore, contemplate that an agricultural committee should encourage the union of its tenants into agricultural associations to which it should make advances on the collective guarantee of the members for the purpose of stocking farms. The committee would borrow the money from which to make loans on a national guarantee, the interest being a first charge on the capital of the farms. In this way the difficulty of allotting the loan among the component bodies of the committee would be small. The risk in any case would not be great. Responsibility for making the advances to individuals would lie with the association, which would be bound in self-defence to see to it that the borrower was of good character. In this way we would follow the excellent example of the Continental associations, and it is worth noting that the moral character of the villagers generally improves where there is an association so that they may qualify for a loan. It is better that the committee should make advances to such an association rather than stock the farms itself, not only on account of the additional security, but on account of the impulse given to co-operation. The farmers could also utilize these associations for the joint purchase of seeds, manures, etc., and also for sale of farm produce. One specialty of farm capital is that much of it is only used for a brief part of the year and lies idle during the rest, such as reapers, etc., which are also too costly for the small man. Aided by loans from the committee, an association might purchase such machines and hold them in common property, letting them out in rotation among the members. The improvement of our cattle and sheep herds might also be furthered by the common ownership of pedigree bulls, rams, etc., in the same way.

Marketing the Produce.

The Agricultural Committees might still further assist the farmers by helping to organize the sale of their produce. To some extent this would be done by the extension of light railways and motor services in order to improve the means of communication and transport. The Post Office might also institute an agricultural parcels post. But even after everything had been done in this way, and even after railway rates had been reduced as a result of nationalization, much would remain to be done before railway transport was organized in the cheapest possible fashion. Once again the Congested Districts Board affords us a precedent, for it for some years bought fish from the fishermen on the West Coast of Ireland, cured them,

and arranged for their sale in Manchester; when it had proved to the private fish-dealers that a lucrative trade was possible it retired from the business. The Australian colonies undertake the inspection and classification of produce. The Victorian Deparment of Agriculture undertakes the proper shipment of eggs and poultry through its cold storage depot.

A beginning might be made by getting municipal supplies from the communal tenants—the grain, dairy and vegetable products for the poor-houses, industrial schools, etc., fodder for the municipal horses, and the horses themselves might be bred on the communally owned farms. If the milk supply is municipalized that would afford an opportunity for further integration. The government might buy their remounts direct from the farmers, sending good stallions into the different districts, or might even start large horse farms. The War Office and Admiralty might also arrange for supplies of butter, cheese, bacon and vegetables from the county tenants. Some things might also be done for the supply of the general market. Working through the agricultural associations the agricultural committees might make advances for the starting of creameries, and might supervise the grading and standardizing of butter and cheese. The certificate of the Irish Board of Agriculture is valued by the Irish tenants, and has had good results in improving the quality of the products. Packing and forwarding agencies might be started in various centres, to collect agricultural produce, grade it, and forward it to the markets in quantities large enough to secure the best terms from the railway companies. From each agency collectors might tour the neighboring districts in regular circuits, collecting eggs, etc., from the farmers and cottagers. The L. and N.W. Railway Company collects ducks in the Aylesbury district in its own carts and sends them to London. The low value of much British farm produce is due to imperfect grading and careless packing, defects which would be remedied at the agency. The expenses of collection, etc., would, of course, form a first charge on the prices obtained. Co-operative jam factories might also be set up in fruit-growing counties. The natural sale area of any rural district is the towns in its immediate vicinity, and the committees would turn their attention to obtaining proper market facilities in these by establishing sale agencies. Negotiations might also be opened up with co-operative stores for the supply of agricultural produce to be re-sold to their members. The general principle to be kept in mind is that the market is large enough to allow all British growers to dispose of all their produce provided it is of the same quality and cheapness as foreign produce, and that consequently it is their business to co-operate in order to secure the best terms of sale instead of entering into foolish competition with each other.

We need not be disappointed, however, if not much produce comes into the market from the smaller classes of holdings, especially those where the occupiers follow some other avocation as well. Mr. Winfrey, writing of the small holdings in Spalding, says: "The tenant is well aware that his best policy is not to sell at all, but consume as much as possible of his produce in the form of potatoes, vegetables, home-baked bread, home-fed bacon and home-grown broad beans, not to name a couple of domestic fowls occasionally on

Sunday for dinner. In this way he avoids selling his produce in a bulk at a low figure, and having to buy bread and meat. His table can generally be well stocked with plain food from the land, leaving his wages free for other purposes. Straw, too, is a great convenience. It makes possible the Christmas fat pig." Such small holders would particularly profit from the collecting agencies suggested above. Poultry rearing is best undertaken as an adjunct to other farming; to devote an acre or two of a small farm to bush or tree fruit, or to early vegetables, is generally a safe source of good profit. But the cost of getting the goods to market often destroys all the grower's gain. The institution of a daily motor goods service connecting a small farm district with the nearest town or a suitable railway station, consequently, commends itself to us as not only convenient to the grower but also advantageous to the public.

So far we have discussed what the State can do to put land, capital and a market within reach of the agriculturist. One thing still remains—skill—and the State can aid in its provision.

Educating the Agriculturist.

Beginning at the bottom, education in country districts must be aimed more directly than it is to-day at fitting the children for a rural life. We will make no truce with the proposal to supply farmers with cheap child labor in the guise of a seasonal half-time system on the plea that if boys are not applied early to farm labor, they will abandon the land. Such plans as those of the Bishop of Hereford for reducing the age of school attendance to twelve years must be swept aside as scandalous. When a career on the land is offered to the agricultural laborer's son, it will be found that a good education, if not entirely bookish, will fit, and not unfit, him for his work. This is even more true of middle class education, so lamentably faulty in country districts. Continuation school work in agricultural subjects might also be tried for the benefit of lads who have left school. Existing agricultural colleges are doing good work, but there should be more of them; and their instruction should be brought within the reach of the quite small man, who might be able to take a special course, but cannot afford much in fees. In other ways technical instruction might be brought to the doors, as it were, of the farmers. Already some county councils send travelling dairies round the countryside to instruct dairy workers; but this tends to perpetuate the private dairy, whereas the future lies with the co-operative dairy of the Danish stamp. Agricultural organizers and instructors might be employed who, by personal visits, or by holding quite small meetings, might give the farmers much useful instruction and information, and help to keep them up to date both as regards markets and the application of science to agriculture. The formation of farmers' clubs, shows, agricultural societies, and the vivification of those now existing, would help to this end. In agricultural research we are lamentably behind every other country, our colonies included. We have relied on the munificence of a few individuals, and lately on the enterprise of the universities. This is a matter of the most urgent importance. To take but one example, the future of British wheat farming will turn largely on the possibility of evolving by cross fertilization a new wheat combining the good baking qualities of Canadian wheat and

the large cropping qualities of British wheat. To aid this object the Board of Agriculture has during the last few years contributed the munificent sum of £100. No doubt the regulation of fisheries and the control of imported dogs are important functions; but besides the administration of general laws as to animal diseases and the enforcement of sanitary provisions, the main duty of the Board of Agriculture in future must be the purveying of information. It must in fact become the intelligence department of rural Britain as well as the statistical; and among other institutions bearing upon this work, it must organize a research department in which the best agricultural talent that can be obtained should be constantly at work on the improvement of agricultural methods and processes and the solution of urgent agricultural problems.

The Agriculturist of the Future.

Many writers dilate upon the dulness of rural life, and to the agricultural laborer it must be dull enough. Underpaid, underfed, badly housed, with little pleasure in the present and scant hope for the future, and with a tradition of oppression from all the classes above him—the liberty and the squalid attractions of the great town easily overpower the few ties that bind him to the country. This is the kind of life we desire to change. Give him a decent wage, decent food, a decent house, security from the interference of squire, farmer and parson in his private affairs, and, above all, a real chance of bettering himself, and we shall see a new style of agricultural worker. There is something in the "magic of property," above all of property in oneself.

Much depends upon the way in which the housing problem is solved, not merely the house accommodation but the grouping of the houses. The large farm, which some look to for the salvation of agriculture, with its isolated farmhouse (or perhaps an absentee farmer in a town some miles away) staffed by a few shepherds or engineers, does not sound as if likely to add much to the gaiety of rural life. When the local authority builds cottages for laborers it must build them neither in isolated ones or twos about a farm nor yet in close conglomerations in some marshy hollow, but in loose clusters, surrounded with gardens, interspersed with the bigger houses of the larger farmers. The dwelling houses of the small farmers might be in the same or similar groups, while the farm buildings were on the holdings some distance away but yet within easy reach. In this way a chain of associated life would run through the countryside. With the revival of agriculture would come also the revival of the small towns which at present decay with the decay of rural industry. In this way, in a real and practical sense, the towns would be "spread over the country," and a stimulus given to the decentralization of manufacture. Round their suburbs would run a ring of farms, and within their precincts many of the workers on the nearer large holdings might reside. The outer village-clusters would be closely connected with them by motor services and light railways. In all these ways the best elements of town and country life would be interfused. The rural districts would be more closely settled, and while the general health of the nation would be improved, dulness and apathy would be eliminated from country life.

Summary.

To sum up : the breakdown of private enterprise in agriculture has left us with landlords and farmers impoverished, with agricultural laborers earning less than, or just over, subsistence wages. Much capital has been lost, the agricultural population has declined to a dangerous degree. There is no organization for the supply of our growing town markets, everywhere is chaos, while the foreign producer every day gains ground by superior organization. It is necessary for the State to interfere, partly to secure the better utilization of our national resources, partly to increase our agricultural population. We must look forward to five and twenty years of resolute effort ; prosperity cannot be restored in a day. The class most needing protection, the laborers, must be dealt with first in order to raise them to a decent level of comfort. A living wage must be secured to them and, as a consequence, the farmers' rents must be fixed at a fair level. An Agricultural Court must be set up in each county to regulate wages and fix rents. Continental success in agriculture depends on co-operation, and that in turn is associated with the peasant proprietor system. That system for sundry reasons cannot be adopted here, but its advantages can be obtained through security of tenure. The small farm system should, therefore, form the basis of our reconstruction, free play being left for a graded system of farms where possible. In each county an Agricultural Committee should have compulsory power to acquire land and let it out to tenants, chiefly small holders. It should have power to advance capital to individuals on the collective guarantee of its tenants, and it should be its duty to organize the collection of farm produce and its disposal in the market.

All the evidence we possess points to the probability that in this way we would increase our agricultural population, and thereby ameliorate many town problems. Yet it is risky and certainly revolutionary, but that is always the case when order has to be brought out of chaos. The process, however, will be gradual, not catastrophic, and as it goes on the rural dwellers will learn that county government is not something outside them, but that it is themselves, concerned with their interests, flourishing with their prosperity, decaying in their adversity. When this lesson has been learned, the development will proceed swiftly and harmoniously to the desired end.

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